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## Bill takes the bus

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I'm a guinea pig.

One of about 30 so far, and possibly more in the coming days and weeks.

This morning, I'll be taking StarMetro to work instead of driving my car, alone, the roughly 16 miles to my office at the newspaper from my home in Killearn Lakes, as I've done for the past 17 years.

Here's my travel plan on this, the launch day for the PARC (Park-and-Ride Community) pilot project:

Drive to Premier Health & Fitness Center on Maclay Boulevard and park in one of the 30 designated PARC spots that Premier, one of several PARC partners, has set aside. Arrival time: about 8 a.m., given a 15-minute drive from my house.

Cross Maclay to a StarMetro stop and catch the Route 16 bus at 8:11. Arrive at C.K. Steele Plaza downtown about 30 minutes later, then transfer to a Route 12 bus at 9 a.m. and be deposited in front of the *Democrat* around 9:05.

When it's time to go home, usually between 5 and 6:30 p.m. depending on how smoothly the day goes, I'll have to check the StarMetro schedule to figure out how much time I should give myself to get across Magnolia Drive to catch the Route 12 bus back to the Plaza, then transfer to the Route 16 bus back to Premier.

In late October, when the Route 80X express route is supposed to be extended to stops farther north on Thomasville Road, I plan to occasionally park at Target and catch that bus downtown before transferring to the 12 bus to my office.

I'm looking at it as an adventure - a change in routine that I hope will be both personally rewarding and environmentally responsible.

It's not about saving time, obviously. My drive to work normally takes about 25 minutes - longer when I go home because of congestion on Thomasville.

Rather, it's about saving energy, and maybe a little money. And, as someone who has enthusiastically promoted the benefits of public transportation and expressed my hope that more people along the socioeconomic spectrum would make use of it, it was high time I started doing what I'd encouraged others to do.

So, today, StarMetro becomes part of my semi-regular routine instead of just an issue I occasionally address as an editorial writer and columnist.

I'm not a newcomer to public transit. In other cities. Never, I'm a little embarrassed to admit, in the community I've called home for the past 26 years.

Like most of us, I'm car-centered. Eighty percent of us who commute here in Leon County drive our vehicles to work, alone. Anyone who has lived here for a few years has noticed the result: Our roads are more congested, our commutes take longer, our gas bills have gotten higher.

It's a bad idea to try to simply try to build our way out of the problem, so I think part of the solution is for StarMetro to play a bigger role in Tallahassee's future in respect to managing growth.

Not that I don't like driving, or the independence and opportunity for some alone time that a car provides. But I think we each have a responsibility, however small, to occasionally set aside what's easiest or most convenient for us if there's a broader benefit to consider.

Not that I think I'm saving the world by using the bus at least an average of twice a week between now and Dec. 7, as my PARC compact requires. My hope is that I might help more people who live in the northeast consider an option they haven't considered until now - and also leave a slightly lighter carbon footprint.

My motivation isn't completely selfless, either. I'm sure I'll get to know a few folks I don't know now. And I'll have some additional reading and talking time. I love to do both.

My commitment to the PARC project is forcing some other changes in my routine, one of which leaves me a little sad because I'll miss some familiar faces. For years I've worked out at the Parkway branch of the YMCA, because of its proximity to my office. Now, I'll join Premier, since it's much more convenient to my new routine.

I'm hopeful that the changes will be to my liking. I don't realistically expect to encounter no problems or frustrations. That comes with change.

I'll occasionally let you know how it's going. And maybe I'll wave while you're driving to work.

**What:** PARC (Park-and-Ride Community), a pilot program to encourage more northeast residents to ride StarMetro. PARC is a program of Greenovation, a Knight Creative Communities Initiative whose goals include promoting sustainable practices.

**When:** Starts today and runs through Dec. 7.

**How to join:** Go to [www.parkandridetallahassee.com](http://www.parkandridetallahassee.com) or call LaRae Donnellan, 766-0049, or Lester Hutt, 264-9187.

**Partners:** StarMetro; Premier Health & Fitness Center; Smith, Thompson, Shaw and Manausa law firm; Awards4U; FedEx Kinko's; CoreMessage Inc.; Moore Consulting Group; Commuter Services of North Florida; Momo's Pizza; Po' Boys Creole Cafe; Lucy Ho's.